

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6205
INFO AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 1060

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PROP, PLAB, PERP, IZ, TS
SUBJ: IRAQI-TUNISIAN RELATIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 305

1. IRAQI MEDIA AND PUBLIC FIGURES CONTINUE TO TAKE CRITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD TUNISIA. BAATH PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL MICHEL AFLAQ IN APRIL 6 SPEECH PRAISED THE "POPULAR UPRISING WHICH SWEPT TUNISIA SOME MONTHS AGO." WHILE AFLAQ DOES NOT SPEAK FOR IRAQI REGIME HIS VIEWS CERTAINLY REFLECT ATTITUDE OF BAATH PARTY IDEOLOGUES TOWARD TUNISIA'S INTERNAL CONDITIONS.

2. IRAQI MEDIA OF APRIL 22 AND 23 GAVE PROMINENT ATTENTION TO CABLE FROM TUNISIAN COMMUNIST PARTY TO BAATH PARTY NATIONAL COMMAND. MESSAGE PRAISED BAATH PARTY, AND IRAQI REGIME, AND CONCLUDED WITH EXPRESSION OF HOPE THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES COULD BE STRENGTHENED. SUBSTANCE OF MESSAGE WAS UNREMARKABLE AND ITS PLACE OF ORIGIN UNNAMED. READINESS OF IRAQ'S CONTROLLED MEDIA TO FEATURE IT SO PROMINENTLY SUGGESTS THAT IRAQI REGIME CONTINUES TO ACCORD LOW PRIORITY TO GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

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3. BAGHDAD BASED CLAIMANT TO LEADERSHIP OF PAN-ARAB LABOR MOVEMENT, SECRETARY GENERAL OF ICATU-B, ALI AL-MAWLA, ISSUED A STATEMENT MAY 9 IN SUPPORT OF TUNISIAN WORKERS IN THEIR "STRUGGLE FOR ACHIEVING THEIR RIGHTS." MAWLA'S STATEMENT CAME AFTER A MEETING WITH HASSAN AL-NURI, DESCRIBED HERE AS ACTING SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE TUNISIAN GENERAL UNION OF WORKERS. DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY TUNIS WILL RECALL THAT IRAQIS TOOK

A STRONG POSITION AT THE TIME OF LABOR DISTURBANCES IN TUNISIA AND THE ARREST OF HABIB AL-ACHOUR. MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, FORMERLY HEAD OF IRAQI LABOR MOVEMENT, HAS ALSO MADE A RECENT STATEMENT CRITICAL OF THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT FOR ITS ALLEGED SUPPRESSION OF TRADE UNION FREEDOMS.

4. TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR, IN TALK WITH PRINCIPAL OFFICER ON MAY 18, SAID THAT HE HAD BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY THE INAPPROPRIATE NATURE OF REMARKS SUCH AS THE ABOVE. HE BELIEVES THAT HIS DEMARCHES MAY HAVE HAD SOME EFFECT IN TONING DOWN ANTI-TUNISIAN MEDIA COVERAGE BUT RECOGNIZES THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS LIMITED INFLUENCE ON SENIOR IRAQI OFFICIALS. HE DEPLORED THE IRAQI PENCHANT FOR MAXIMIZING THE NUMBER OF ITS ENEMIES WITHIN THE ARAB WORLD. HE ADDED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAS REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IRAQ SUPPORTS ANTI-REGIME ELEMENTS IN TUNISIA VIA THE ACTIVITIES OF SO-CALLED TUNISIAN BAATHIS WHO ARE OR WERE STUDENTS IN IRAQ.

5. COMMENT: IRAQI TREATMENT OF EVENTS IN TUNISIA, WHILE IT MAY APPEAR GRATUITOUS, MAKES SENSE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RADICAL BAATHI LOGIC. THE IRAQ REGIME, STRIVING AT TIMES TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH MODERATE OR CONSERVATIVE ARAB GOVERNMENTS, SEEMS UNABLE TO RESIST THE CLAIMS OF BAATHI IDEOLOGUES WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES THE CONSCIENCE OF THE ARAB NATION. LATTER INDIVIDUALS, USUALLY VIA THE BAATH NATIONAL COMMAND BUT OFTEN USING THE ORGANS OF THE IRAQI STATE AS WELL, CONFIDENTIAL

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SEEK OUT TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY. TUNISIA, IN WAKE OF JANUARY'S INTERNAL DISTURBANCES, LOOKED IN THEIR EYES RIPE FOR THE KIND OF REVOLUTION WHICH THEY EXPECT TO EVENTUALLY COME TO ALL ARAB COUNTRIES.
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